

ABSTRACT

Tourism sector development in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) put enormous pressure on local ecosystems where rapid growth of tourism activities have taken place. Local authorities that should play the role of enabler and regulator do not know how to deal with the rapid pace of tourism development and its impacts. Therefore, this study aims to examine how local authorities in some ecologically sensitive destinations in GMS are dealing with tourism. The research employed a multiple case study approach. Some river based, eco- tourism destinations in the middle part of the Mekong river basin, viz., Vang Vieng in Lao, and Pai in Thailand were studied first to understand the factors that affect the ecological sensitivity of a tourism destination. These factors were used to analyze the trend of tourism growth in the newly emerging destination, Chiang Khan, in Loei province of Thailand. The study finds that Chiang Khan is experiencing even more rapid tourism growth compared to Vang Vieng and Pai. It also finds that the local authority in Chiang Khan is not effective in managing the changes and development in the eco-system. The study proposes some environmental management measures (EMMs) based on the findings from all three cases.

Keywords: ecologically sensitive tourism destinations, tourism development, environmental management, local authority, Greater Mekong Sub-region